Scrutiny Committee

Members of the Scrutiny Committee:

Mrs M Dewsbury (Chairman)
Mr B McClenning (Vice Chairman)
Mr L Hornby
Mr T Lewis
Mr A Pond
Mrs S Thomson
Mr K Tilcock
Mr G Watt
Mr K Weeks
Mrs J Wilby
Mr M Windridge

Group Meetings

Conservatives:
Blomefield Room 9.00 am

Liberal Democrats:
Kett Room 9.00 am

If any member of the public wishes to speak on a non-confidential item, they may do so at the discretion of the Chairman

Date
Wednesday 2 July 2014

Time
9.30 am

Place
Colman & Cavell Rooms
South Norfolk House
Long Stratton
Norwich
Norfolk
NR15 2XE

Contact
Caroline Heasley  tel (01508) 533685
South Norfolk District Council
Swan Lane
Long Stratton Norwich
NR15 2XE

Email: democracy@s-norfolk.gov.uk

If you have any special requirements in order to attend this meeting, please let us know in advance
Large print version can be made available
AGENDA

At the discretion of the Chairman, a short break will be taken after the meeting has been running for approximately two hours.

1. To report apologies for absence and to identify substitute members;

2. Any items of business which the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act, 1972. Urgent business may only be taken if, "by reason of special circumstances" (which will be recorded in the minutes), the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion that the item should be considered as a matter of urgency;

3. To Receive Declarations of Interest from Members;
   (Please see guidance form and flow chart attached – page 4)

4. To confirm the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 May 2014
   (attached – page 6)

5. The Welfare Reform Agenda one year on – An Update;
   (report attached – page 9)

6. Whitlingham Charitable Trust Funding Agreement;
   (report attached – page 15)

7. Scrutiny Work Programme and Cabinet Core Agenda;
   (attached – page 20)
Working style of the scrutiny committee and a protocol for those attending scrutiny

Independence
Members of the Scrutiny Committee will not be subject to whipping arrangements by party groups.

Member leadership
Members of the Committee will take the lead in selecting topics for and in questioning witnesses. The Committee will expect members of Cabinet, rather than officers, to take the main responsibility for answering the Committee's questions about topics, which relate mainly to the Council's activities.

A constructive atmosphere
Meetings of the Committee will be constructive, and not judgmental, accepting that effective overview and scrutiny is best achieved through challenging and constructive enquiry. People giving evidence at the Committee should not feel under attack.

Respect and trust
Meetings will be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and trust.

Openness and transparency
The Committee’s business will be open and transparent, except where there are sound reasons for protecting confidentiality. In particular, the minutes of the Committee’s meetings will explain the discussion and debate, so that it could be understood by those who were not present.

Consensus
Members of the Committee will work together and, while recognising political allegiances, will attempt to achieve consensus and agreed recommendations.

Impartial and independent officer advice
Officers who advise and support the Committee will give impartial and independent advice, recognising the importance of the Scrutiny Committee in the Council's arrangements for governance, as set out in the Constitution.

Regular review
There will be regular reviews of how the overview and scrutiny process is working, and a willingness to change if it is not working well.

Programming and planning
The Scrutiny Committee will have a programme of work. Members will agree the topics to be included in the work programme, the extent of the investigation to be undertaken in relation to resources, and the witnesses to be invited to give evidence.

Managing time
The Committee will attempt to conclude the business of each meeting in reasonable time. The order of business will be arranged as far as possible to minimise the demands on the time of witnesses.
The Welfare Reform Agenda one year on – An Update

A report was taken to Scrutiny Committee in September 2013 to give an overview of the impact the Welfare Reform Agenda was having on residents (6 months into the programme) and the work we had undertaken.

Scrutiny responded by noting this work and asking that a further update on the impact to residents, any preventative work and the progress of Universal Credit to be brought to the committee June/July 2014.

This report is a response to that request.

Cabinet member(s):
Yvonne Bendle

Ward(s) affected:
All

Contact Officer, telephone number, and e-mail:
Amanda Adams
01508 533773 aadams@s-norfolk.gov.uk
Martyn Swann
01508 533694 mswann@s-norfolk.gov.uk

1. **Purpose of Overview**

1.1. To inform Members of the impact the Welfare Reform Agenda has had on our residents, the preventative work taking place and an update on the national roll out of Universal Credit.

2. **Scope of Overview**

2.1. To look at the impact on residents following certain aspects of the reforms, specifically:

2.1.1. The Spare Room Reduction in Housing Benefit (HB)
2.1.2. The Benefit ‘Cap’
2.1.3. The replacement of Council Tax Benefit with Council Tax Support
3. Findings – specific impact on residents

3.1. Spare Room Reduction

3.1.1. Last year 718 Social Housing tenants were affected by the reduction to their HB due to the spare room reduction. This number has decreased and currently we have 656 affected; breaking down to 592 tenants who have their HB reduced by 14% and 64 tenants who have their HB reduced by 25%.

3.1.2. Our partners within Social Housing have found that these reductions in HB have not had the significant impact they feared and that rent arrears for this group is ‘only slightly higher’ than for all tenants. This may have been mitigated to some extent by an investment in resourcing outreach staff who have worked closely with all tenants affected. These staff have assisted tenants in applications for DHP and other charitable sources, helped with budgeting and have discussed the potential to move to smaller homes and appropriate exchanges.

3.2. The Benefit Cap

3.2.1. Initially, in July 2013 the DWP identified 34 families who were to be capped (22 of these held Saffron tenancies). This number quickly reduced and we currently have 13 cases.

3.2.2. The reasons for removal of the cap are varied but most are around either claimants finding work or, in the case of single parents, partners (who work) moving in. A few people have made up the shortfall in their rent but some have been unable to do that. This has led to arrears in some cases, for example; our largest Housing Provider, Saffron, has 6 of these households in arrears. Of these 6, Saffron has obtained 1 Possession Order, 4 have Notices to Seek Possession in place and 1 is working with Saffron and has made an agreement to pay the arrears and is complying with this.

3.3. Council Tax Support

3.3.1. Our scheme this year reflects the principles agreed prior to April 2013 by councillors in that it is a scheme which incentivises work, protects families and is affordable with the budget constraints imposed. The following general rules apply:

- Working age people receiving ‘out of work’ benefits can get up to 72% off their bill
- Working people on a low income can get up to 85% off their bill – this higher rate is to make sure they are better off in work
- Claimants living in higher band properties will get support calculated based on Council Tax Band D
- Claims with non-dependant adults will have £5 flat rate deduction for each one
- Maintenance income is counted as income when calculating support
- Child Benefit is not counted as income
- Residents who lose their job and haven’t claimed in the last year will have their Council Tax paid in full for 13 weeks
- Pensioners are protected and treated under the ‘old’ Council Tax Benefit rules
- Lone parents with children under 5 years are protected and treated under the ‘old’ Council Tax Benefit rules

3.3.2. We currently have over 8000 people claiming council tax support; 52% of whom are pensioners and 48% working age. All working age people were contacted in January 2014 prior to the council tax bills being issued in March to explain the changes as they were the most adversely affected. Despite the increase in customer contact it was beneficial to those affected to have reasonable notice that they would be asked to pay more council tax.

3.3.3. The CTS scheme 2013/14 did have an effect on recovery activity which increased significantly. However our overall position at the end of the year showed very small decrease in collection rate (by 0.1%) which was well within the budget we had set of 0.5%.

3.3.4. Currently, the new scheme appears to be also having an effect on council tax collection. It is very early in the year to draw too many conclusions however, while the collection rate as a whole is over 20% the rate for those on Working Age CTS is only 12%.

3.4. Discretionary Help

3.4.1. There are two discretionary funds; DHP which is to support those with a shortfall in rent and Discretionary Award to support those with a shortfall in Council Tax. Residents can apply for either or both of the funds.

3.4.2. During 2013/14 we supported 314 residents with their rent payments (DHP), total £143,468 which was funded by central government. The breakdown of the reasons for the award in terms of the impact of Welfare Reform was as follows:
- 153 due to spare room reduction
- 2 due to benefit cap
- 30 due to a combination of all reforms
- 129 awards not related to Welfare Reform

3.4.3. During 2013/14 we supported 171 residents with their Council Tax payments, totalling £30,000 which was funded by South Norfolk Council.

3.4.4. Clearly, the impact of Welfare Reform has meant we have seen a significant increase in the applications for discretionary funding. We are currently seeing further applications from people who received awards last year but have not made changes in their circumstances so continue to not be able to afford their rent. Consequently we are reiterating that anyone who receives an award does make the necessary changes and it is part of their application to explain how they will make those changes. We will offer support to make those
changes as appropriate. We also have implemented a ‘stepped’ approach whereby over the year support is removed gradually so as not to create a ‘cliff-edge’ of provision withdrawal.

4. **Findings – wider impact on external partners**

4.1. Registered Providers have taken steps to ensure that tenants are moving into homes which are sustainable, based on both affordability and proper occupation of the accommodation. This may result in customers being allocated a home that meets their needs, rather than a home which is, say, too large.

4.2. For example, the proportion of customers in South Norfolk who have not been offered a tenancy that they have bid for over the previous two years has increased. All housing providers are becoming more thorough in their assessment of new customers to ensure that they are not allocated homes which will be of detriment to the in the future because they are financially unsustainable on a long term basis. This work drives stability for the customer, the registered provider, and South Norfolk Council by limiting the opportunity for homelessness to occur.

4.3. In 2013/14 there were 96 new applicants on the housing register because their properties had more bedrooms than they required. The applicants are categorised as follows, as at 31st March 2014:

| Current home has two or more bedrooms than the household requires | 22 |
| Current home has one bedroom more than the household requires   | 74 |

4.4. Of those applicants, 29 secured an outcome and were rehoused in 2013/14.

| Current home has two or more bedrooms than the household requires | 7 |
| Current home has one bedroom more than the household requires   | 22 |

4.5. Social housing residents are able to access support to manage the impact of welfare reform, for example:

4.4.1 Some registered providers have employed staff members who are dedicated to supporting residents who are facing hardship and/or loss of their tenancy due to welfare reform.

4.4.2 Moneywise, Homesafe is a project funded by the BIG Lottery. It is a free, independent service available to residents living in the northern parts of the district. It is designed to offer new tenants of all ages the right level of support and advice; this is offered to customers with or without a social tenancy.

5. **Further response from South Norfolk Council**

5.1. Working with partners

5.1.1. We met with CABx, Social Landlords and Private Landlords in February 2014 to share views on impact of WR and explained our approach to Discretionary Payments going forward.
5.2. Home Options Scheme/Register

5.2.1. Additional priority is given to applicants to SNCs Home Options Scheme if they are under occupying and wishing to downsize. We are increasing the number of small homes which are built in the social sector to accommodate these households, as the demand has increased due to welfare reform.

5.2.2. The revised housing register and housing allocation scheme which targets those most in need resulted in approximately half of the housing register being housed throughout 2013/14, a total of 607 applicants.

5.2.3. The need to provide smaller affordable accommodation for rent through new development has been recognised and a priority is being placed on ensuring the construction of one bedroom properties in new developments by housing associations and through negotiations with developers. This need was recognised and action take 2 years ago (before the introduction of welfare reform), and there will be an ongoing emphasis on smaller affordable homes for the foreseeable future.

5.2.4. Homeless prevention remains a priority for SNC. There has been an increase in the number of advice cases that have been dealt with than in previous years; 2919 in 2013/14. However, there has been a small reduction in the number of homelessness applications. This highlights our successful approach to offering the right information at an early stage to customers; lessening the likelihood of reaching crisis situations.

5.2.5. This has been achieved through our approach to planning for, and assisting customers to deal with, the welfare reform before its implementation. Our services have been shaped to manage the anticipated demand on council services, and as a result we have enabled services to support and manage customer concerns and have not seen the increase in homelessness applications that there has been in other areas.

6. Going Forward – Early Help

6.1. Currently, services can often tend to focus on those individuals with a higher level of need and are often not integrated. At South Norfolk we want to stop families’ problems escalating to this stage and that means getting families in the door quicker and working with them to identify their needs and find practical solutions.

The Early Help work will support residents by working with partners to offer a joined up service and by offering residents quick practical solutions to get to the route of the problem.

Moving forward to Universal Credit, the Welfare Reform agenda cannot be seen in isolation from Early Help and we will offer integrated local support services to this national scheme.

7. Going Forward – Universal Credit

7.1. UC has been delayed, the DWP latest estimate of national rollout being 2016/2017. This means working age HB claims will move around this time with
pensioner claims moving around 2018. This allows a great deal of trailing and testing to be undertaken before rollout.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Welfare Reform has had an impact on some of our residents but it has not been as significant as we had first feared.

The reductions in HB (through the Cap and Spare Room Reduction) have appeared to have incentivised some people into work and many others are paying the shortfall without discretionary help.

Our CTS scheme incentivises work and protects families as far as possible within the budget constraints and where there are anomalies or real hardship we provide a discretionary fund to help.

We are working with partners to provide an integrated approach with common values focussing on getting people off benefits and into work as well as looking at the whole family holistically.

There is no evidence of any increase in homelessness, this is because SNC is working with more customers earlier to provide support that avoids an outcome of homelessness.

9. Action Required

9.1. Members are requested to endorse the report and work undertaken to implement the welfare reform agenda and consider making any recommendations as appropriate.
Whitlingham Charitable Trust Funding Agreement

**Scrutiny Committee Members are asked to consider the report, assess the effectiveness of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust and consider the development of a more targeted and outcome-focused Funding Agreement.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cabinet member(s):</th>
<th>Ward(s) affected:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martin Wilby</td>
<td>Stoke Holy Cross, Rockland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contact Officer, telephone number, and e-mail: Mark Heazle 01508 533979 mheazle@s-norfolk.gov.uk

1. **Purpose of Scrutiny**
   1.1. The purpose of this scrutiny is to provide members with information on the effectiveness of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust in providing management of Whitlingham Country Park and provide a basis from which to develop potential future Funding Agreements.

2. **Scope of Scrutiny**
   2.1. Although a number of different agencies and organisations are involved in the provision of services and facilities at Whitlingham Country Park, this report considers solely the services and facilities that are the responsibility of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust i.e. the land-based areas of the Whitlingham Country Park (woodland, paths, meadows, car parks).
   2.2. Other agencies/organisations involved in provision at Whitlingham are as follows:
   
   - Norfolk County Council, who manage and operate the Whitlingham Outdoor Education Centre, located on the shore of the Great Broad. NCC is responsible for the management of the water within Whitlingham Country Park, i.e. the Great and Little Broads.
   
   - The Broads Authority, who lease and operate the Flint Barn to provide tourist information services and a sub-contracted café. The BA also ‘hosts’ the Whitlingham Charitable Trust and provides administrative assistance.
   
   - The Whitlingham Boathouses Trust, which is a formal group of five water-based rowing and canoeing clubs, who own and operate a sports facility on the banks of the River Yare, a short distance from the Outdoor Education Centre.
• The Whitlingham Broad Campsite, which is a privately-run operation on land leased directly from the Crown Point Estate, located opposite the Flint Barn Visitor Centre.

2.3. Cllr Sue Thomson is a Trustee of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust. The Broads Authority are granted a number of Trustee seats which they delegate to the relevant local authorities – Cllr. Thomson has represented the Council on the Trust for a number of years.

3. Findings

3.1. The Whitlingham Charitable Trust (WCT) was established in 1998 under the terms of an agreement between Norfolk County Council and the Arminghall Settlement, the landowners, for the extraction of gravel from the site. It commenced operation in 1992 with the handover of Trowse Wood and Meadow, followed by the acquisition of Whitlingham Wood and Whitlingham Little Broad in 1994 and 1996 respectively. In 2005, Whitlingham Outdoor Education Centre was opened, managed by Norfolk County Council and in 2006 the Flint Barn Visitor Centre was opened. This is leased to and managed by the Broads Authority (BA) on behalf of the Trust and provided a focal point for visitors to the Whitlingham Country Park as well as an information centre for the Broads generally.

3.2. The Trust as a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Its activities, as listed on the Charity Commission website, are to ‘Manage and conserve Whitlingham Country Park for the recreation and enjoyment of members of the public who wish to enjoy its amenities for quiet and peaceful pursuits in a rural environment.’

3.3. Previous SLAs have not covered the provision of formal sporting opportunities at Whitlingham, which are provided by Norfolk County Council at the Outdoor Education Centre and the Whitlingham Boathouses Trust (see 2.2)

3.4. For a number of years South Norfolk Council has contributed financially to the running costs of the Trust in enabling it to carry out its activities. The Trust became a Key Service Organisation in 2004 and grants of £15,000 per annum were paid over, as part of a 3 year funding agreement. In April 2010 a further 3 year Service Level Agreement with an annual SNC contribution of £10,000 was agreed, subject to the following outcomes being successfully delivered:

- Attract more visitors (achieved, although not to the 176,000 Visitor Centre target)
- New road access (achieved)
- New car park (delivered in 2011/12)
- Develop and improve Low Ropes Course (delivered in 2011/12, funded through Big Lottery funding and maintained by South Norfolk Council)
- Tackle environmental crime (no data available)
3.5. South Norfolk Council had previously leased and managed some land at Whitlingham Country Park. In 2004/05 this was devolved to the WCT on the understanding that South Norfolk Council continued to provide financial support for the management of that land. This offered the authority cost savings at that time.

3.6. Following the expiration of the 2010 SLA at the end of the 12/13 financial year, it has continued on a rolling year-by-year basis. During 2013/14 South Norfolk Council’s Funding Manager has carried out a review of the funding arrangements that we have with a wide range of external partner organisations, which has resulted in the renegotiation of service level and funding agreements to ensure that all investment SNC makes in external organisations is aligned with the corporate priorities of the authority. This is the case with the agreement with the Whitlingham Charitable Trust as we wish to ensure that all future agreements are fit for purpose and that organisations that we work with are delivering services that reflect our priorities, in a way that the impact can be evidenced.

3.7. User numbers – because of its legal status as a charitable company, limited by guarantee, the Trust is obliged to provide the Charity Commission with an annual report. These are publicly available on the Charity Commission website and paint a good overall picture of the work of the Trust in meeting its objectives. Because of the open nature of the Park, the Trust has no way of accurately reporting the number of people that use the park, but the annual reports state the following estimates, by total park users and those visiting the Flint Barn Visitor Centre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Park Users (est)</th>
<th>Visitor Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>122,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,810,000</td>
<td>382,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8. Financial information – again, this forms a key part of the Trustee’s annual report to the Charity Commission. The Trust is financed through investment income (via a significant endowment at the inception of the Trust) and income from activities, such as events, grants and income from car parking (see paragraph 2.5). The most recent Report and Financial Statement was filed in October 2013 and covers the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013. This details that income and expenditure for that and preceding years are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>+/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>2010/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£284,019</td>
<td>£259,787</td>
<td>£218,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£191,636</td>
<td>£141,530</td>
<td>£218,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£176,304</td>
<td>£259,787</td>
<td>£241,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£1,160,250</td>
<td>£1,093,873</td>
<td>£1,093,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.9. The financial figures and visitor estimates would suggest that the park is being well managed; income and expenditure are broadly in line with each other, with a relatively small surplus being generated over the course of the last five full financial years. Visitor numbers have also increased substantially since 2008/09, but there has not been a corresponding increase in the expenditure incurred by the WCT during that time, suggesting that the management of the park is offering improving value for money.

3.10. Since 2012, the Trust has contracted the services of an external company, ParkingEye, to oversee the management of the six car parks that are available for use around Whittingham Country Park, using an Automatic Number Plate Recognition system. This has not proved universally popular and has elicited a number of complaints from visitors who mistakenly believe that South Norfolk Council is responsible for the parking arrangements at the Park.

4. **Relevant Corporate Priorities**

4.1. **Enhancing our quality of life and the environment we live in** by providing a well-maintained and accessible green space for residents and visitors to enjoy, as well as providing, both directly and indirectly, facilities for residents to take part in regular outdoor-based sport and physical activity.

4.2. **Promoting a thriving local economy** by acting as a key tourist destination in South Norfolk, bringing in visitors from outside of the local area, including the growing sports tourism sector.

4.3. **Supporting communities to realise their potential** through the provision of education, such as the Forest Skills programme, and numerous conservation volunteering opportunities.

4.4. The work of the WCT and the services that it provides can also be linked to two of the four emerging themes that the Council is working to: Economic Growth (see Promoting a Thriving Economy in 4.2 above) and Health & Wellbeing (also see Enhancing quality of life and the environment that we live in in 4.1 above).

**Implications and Risks**

4.5. Financial – South Norfolk Council has made annual financial contributions to the Whittingham Charitable Trust for a number of years, initially based on the transfer of land previously managed by the Council (see 3.5) and represented a cost saving to the Council at the time.
4.6. Legal – South Norfolk Council has no legal obligation to provide funding to the Whitlingham Charitable Trust.

4.7. Environmental – the work of the Whitlingham Charitable Trust is vital in ensuring that Whitlingham Country Park is managed and conserved in an appropriate, environmentally-sustainable manner.

5. **Conclusion**

5.1. The WCT provides an incredibly valuable and popular asset in South Norfolk, an asset that helps us to achieve some of our Corporate Objectives and contributes to numerous outcomes within the authority’s Directorate Plans. It is suggested that members consider whether continued financial support for the WCT is appropriate and, if so, what measures the Council would like to see in relation to performance management. Park visitor numbers are based on estimates but those recorded by the Visitor Centre offer a useful proxy by which to measure the success of the WCT in attracting more people.

6. **Action Required**

6.1. The Scrutiny Committee is requested to endorse the contents of the report and evaluate the outcomes of the current SLA.

6.2. With a view to monitor the outcomes and outcomes more effectively in future, members to consider whether to request that the WCT and partners at the Broads Authority either:

   6.2.1. Develop robust outcome measures and performance indicators with which our investment can be justified (specific details to be agreed by the Trust, in liaison with South Norfolk Council officers, before any further financial contribution is made by South Norfolk Council); or

   6.2.2. Reapply for a nationally recognised management accreditation award such as the Green Flag Award, which would demonstrate quality of management (specific details to be agreed by the Trust, in liaison with South Norfolk Council officers, before any further financial contribution is made by South Norfolk Council).